

MATWATCH

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SPECIAL MIDSUMMER EDITION

AUG. 5-11

One Man's View

WCW: IF YOU ASKED ME...

In my first conversation with Jim Herd in 1989, he told me, "If we were a department store, we'd hang a sign out on the door saying CLOSED FOR REMODELING---WILL REOPEN IN 8 TO 12 WEEKS." In many insiders' grief and anger over the demise of Ric Flair from World Championship Wrestling, forgotten is the state of the then-NWA more than two-and-a-half years ago.

The NWA is over. Finis. Sayonara. Unless Flair chooses to work as the NWA world champion in Japan and U.S. independents (and by the time you read this, he may have chosen otherwise). A black wreath has already been lain across its grave (see page 5 for details).

But as easy as it is to sit back and decry what might have been, that's not constructive., it only serves as a catharsis for three years of frustration for traditionalists (and I include myself in that corps) who had high hopes at Turner Broadcasting's purchase of Jim Crockett Promotions in November 1988.

But even a Flairless WCW has access to six national hours of television per week (nine if you count the syndicated MAIN EVENT and the WGN and WPIX shows) and an average of 1.2-1.5 million homes per week, albeit a declining number from last year. It is still producing four national specials per year and although the last two have failed to crack a 4.0 rating, viewers in more than two million homes tuned into them.

WCW has just registered its lowest buy-rate ever on a pay-per-view show but the increased universe to 15.8 million homes ensured a respectable profit for THE GREAT AMERICAN BASH (see page 5), even with the anger over the Flair mess.

There is much I can parallel to this situation, from a broadcasting standpoint, to the one I inherited when I became news director and later operations manager of WBBJ-TV in Jackson TN 16 months ago. I took on a responsibility that, if we had demonstrated unconventional guts, should have forced us to hang up a similar sign. This was worse than starting from scratch. I'll bluntly tell you this may have been the worst television station in America. A news department with badly divided factions, a station which had been without a general manager or news director for seven months and morale which had been decimated. Public confidence had deteriorated to the point that more people in our home city of Jackson were tuning to Memphis and Nashville newscasts in the early evening. The weekend I came to interview, WBBJ did not even present one local story on its 6:00 newscast. It was that bad. It has



Steve

Beverly

taken nearly a year and a half and two health scares to get my division to a point of respectability. We're not great. Compared to our far better-funded brethren along I-40, we're not even good. But we don't have to apologize for our product any more. Ratings and demographics have increased and the ratio of daily news tips have multiplied. Complaints are up because our content is more controversial. In May of last year, they weren't calling at all. However, it has taken patience, pain and hard, debilitating work to take it to this point.

I relate my own experience to you because World Championship Wrestling, Inc., is in a similar state, starting over or perhaps even worse than starting from scratch. Anyone in the television business will tell you it is far more of a mountain-climb to rekindle confidence in lost viewership than to build on strong, established loyalties. It's when your corps audience waves goodbye that serious trouble is at hand.

It may be six to nine months before we see if the Flair departure has created a fatal disease for WCW's TV ratings, particularly on TBS---which is the company's number one priority, along with pay-per-view revenues. Typically, that's the length it takes to see if consistent positive or negative trends develop in audience levels, whether it's news, an established entertainment series or wrestling. Mind you, I'm not talking about arena shows here. I'm talking strictly TV.

They haven't asked my advice (actually, one of the highest-level executives in Turner has) but based on a combination of perceptions I get from mail, the responses from doing five different talk/radio shows in the last month and my own gut feelings as a broadcaster, here is my perspective on the WCW situation. What are intended to be constructive suggestions on how to get this company back on track, if it is possible:

CREATIVITY

*****RETURN THE COMPANY TO WRESTLING:** This promotion has seen so many gimmick matches on pay-per-views in the last year that virtually none of them have any uniqueness or effectiveness. The fallacy of the scaffold match was exposed at the BASH. Everything was thrown at the fans but a mudbath match (which, unfortunately, has been considered, of late). The common thread of responses I hear on radio shows and through the mail is, "When TBS bought the company, they said, 'WE WRESTLE!'" Now I don't think fans mean the kind of wrestling

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STEVE BEVERLY

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George Scott was foisting on us with seven minutes of armbars and holds in between 90 seconds of action and high spots. But performers capable of giving you a solid 20-30 minute main event or semifinal with that rare hour Broadway. They may have lost the best in the game at that but between Barry Windham, Arn Anderson, Bobby Eaton, Terry Taylor, Brian Pillman and even Sting, WCW still has personnel with proven capabilities to go longer distances. Though it was with Flair, even Lex Luger has gone 39 minutes. Clearly, the hysteria of the Steiners vs. Sting and Luger at SUPERBRAWL (never mind the ending) prove what draws response from fans---hard contact, high workrate excitement.

*****DEVELOP A LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT DIVISION AND BE PATIENT WITH IT:** If American fans are ever to be re-educated to accept lighter-weight, faster-paced competitors, it will be a one-to-two year process. You can't throw in the towel on it if it does not pay dividends in three weeks. But with the growing controversy over steroids and declining crowds in both of the big two (even when Hulk Hogan headlines a WWF show), the timing appears to be right for somebody to strike out and try a lighter-weight division. Joe Pedicino has had the right idea in Global by raising the weight limits to 237. And don't take a jobber like Denny Brown or an aging veteran like Nelson Royal and slap the belt on him, knowing he'll do jobs in any over-the-weight match. Make it a serious division. I'd make Pillman the champion, have him make quality defenses, then prepare him for a series with Jushin Liger. Tell me that would not be fresh and interesting. But it will take time to build credibility.

*****CHARACTERS:** For merchandising purposes, characters are going to be an essential in any promotion. But this current Keystone Cops collection mixed in with strong, traditional working veterans is like wearing a striped shirt with plaid pants. P.N. News' yo-baby-yo may wow them in the entrance but could you have imagined a Flair-News match?

Plus, with the current brigade, virtually all of them have an ancestor, of sorts, in either Virgil Runnels' or pro wrestling's recent past: Johnny B. Badd is getting a flurry of interest in his ring intros but did Dusty have to give him Ronnie Garvin's one-punch, sit-on-the-victim pinfall? The Diamond Studd is nothing but a poor man's version of Rick Rude. The Young Pistols and the aborted Desperados were nothing but rehases of Dusty's old Texas Broncos and Long Riders. It's almost a cliché to call Curtis Hughes Black Bubba Rogers. And I have this queasy feeling Dusty is on the verge of making Harley Race the James J. Dillon of the 1990s.

Traditional fans do not mind characterizations as long as the performers can back up their work in the ring. Ted DiBiase may be The Million \$ Man but he can still wrestle like DiBiase. Curt Hennig may be Mr. Perfect but on the rare occasions he's turned loose, can you name a better performer? If Bobby Eaton became "The Alabama Jammer," it wouldn't dilute his talent. Arn Anderson was a Horseman and The Enforcer, long before he was a WWF Brainbuster. In their prime, the Road Warriors were self-perpetuating characters but WCW fans expect a higher standard of ring work and are smart enough to

see when characterizations are retreads. It's why so many increasingly stay away from the arenas and turn off the set more: as I said a year ago, they've seen it all before.

If you're going to have a cartoon division, fine. Titan always has. But let your Mark Merros, your Paul Neus, your Johnny B. Badds strictly work the low undercards for the kids and don't mix them in with the veterans or stronger workers until they demonstrate the proper ring maturation. Let your strong, less character-dominated workers have at it in the key points of a show.

And take El Gigante out of the ring on weekly TV. It may already be too late and is probably inconsequential but I get the sensation he is no longer anything special and the BASH match with One-Man Gang did little for him.

BOOKING: One of my biggest criticisms of the Turner era has been its inconsistency. And to suggest another change at this point appears ambiguous. So I'm going to be ambiguous. I felt bringing back Dusty Rhodes as booker would be like the Braves rehiring Eddie Haas. Rhodes was fired in 1988 for virtual insubordination and his final two years as Jim Crockett's creative guru, he had virtually decimated the promotion. I wanted to believe if the man could keep himself out of the ring, he might rekindle some old flames. But after a couple of months of improved TV (at least compared to the end of the Ole Anderson regime), the old stories were being retold.

When we started seeing Diamond Dallas Page and Oliver Humperdink, a return of the distasteful devil-worship act with Kevin Sullivan, the predictable undefeated push for his son, the cowboy teams, the revival of Flair as the champion who never wins, the inevitable cheap finishes and anger-inducing ends to arena shows and the reinserting himself as "senior producer" of TV, it was like a bad dream.

When asked my view by one high up in TBS recently, I had to tell the truth: "It just isn't going to happen with this booker and you even have people within your own company and some veteran wrestling names joking that he's on a demolition mission from Vince McMahon."

Another key insider has told us: "He (Dusty) is getting bad advice from his people on the house shows. The people he's brought in (Terry Allen, Mike Graham, Grizzly Smith) are telling him what they think he wants to hear but nobody's telling him the things that are not working."

This company may be beyond even their touches and, frankly, neither probably would want it now but I still contend it would be worth any piece of change to lure Bill Watts in or Terry Funk back and give either a shot at the top creative post. WCW has tried nine different combinations of bookers and committees. Can you think of someone better?

TELEVISION

THE WEEKLY SHOWS: I made reference to this briefly concerning the TBS shows last week but, frankly, syndication fits as well. The shows are virtually interchangeable---but particularly so on TBS. Where once there was a distinctive flavor to each, you could switch the titles on any given day and never know the difference.

What would I do? I'd reformat each show into its own distinguishable package and flavor. How?

*****POWER HOUR:** I'd try to get TBS to slot this show at 11:30 a.m. this fall as the lead-in to SEC FOOTBALL, so more West Coast and Mountain viewers could see it. I'd move it to a studio setting and possibly change the title to WCW TODAY.

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Possibly even WCW MAGAZINE to capitalize on the tie-in with the publication. Use a male-female anchor combo in an NFL TODAY type of setting (not a Missy Hyatt type for the female but taking someone like a Kimberly Murphy with credibility and a quality broadcaster and teaming her with either Bob Caudle, who has a news background, or Tony Schiavone). Let this serve as a slick preview of the two weekend afternoon shows, a review of the week past in WCW and a look at the week ahead. Personality profiles could air, the top 10 would be introduced, one-on-one faceoffs with feuding foes and a replay of the top matches from the previous week's WCW and MAIN EVENT and short-form clips from the syndicated shows' top bouts. Since this is a morning show, let this be broadly different from the other shows on TBS, WGN and WPIX.

***WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Somehow, this broadcast has to be repositioned as the flagship show. Ideally, I'd cut it back to an hour but the Turner commitment is for two. So I'd make this exclusively the show where angles and storylines are advanced and the key TV matchups are featured which affect the arena shows and pay-per-view contests.

***WCW MAIN EVENT: I'd revert to the original concept of this show, cut it back to three weekly first-run matches with a five-to-seven minute preliminary, a strong light heavy-weight encounter of at least 15 minutes, a quality mat classic from the WCW/NWA/Crockett library and have a defense of at least one WCW championship per week as the true "main event." Keep the DANGER ZONE as an exclusive feature to this show and add a WCW CLOSEUP segment which zeroes in on a key story in the monthly newsstand magazine.

ANNOUNCERS

TBS still possesses the best guy in the business in Jim Ross and he's always sharp on WCW, live in the arena. But lately, on a few POWER HOURS, Jim has sounded tired and he probably is from the numbers of voiceovers he does (WPIX, POWER HOUR, MAIN EVENT, CANADIAN POWER HOUR).

The Paul E. Dangerously-Missy Hyatt sibling rivalry angle has hurt the Ross/Paul E. pairing. Whereas Paul was emerging as a top-flight analyst last fall, still as a heel but more mellow, often now he comes across as a pesky 10-year-old who won't get out of somebody's face. The chemistry Jim and Paul E. had built is at times swimming in uncomfortable tension. The two need to revive the byplay they blended at HALLOWEEN HAVOC and STARRCADE. When they cook, Jim and Paul are the top combo in the game (re: PRO WRESTLING NEW YORK) but their timing on some other shows has been recently a bit off.

I'd take Missy Hyatt off MAIN EVENT and reteam Michael Hayes with Jim. Michael was probably Jim's best broadcast partner and it's not going to adversely affect fan reaction to his Freebird character.

Where stability is even more essential is in the syndicated efforts but I can't buy some of the most recent changes. The revolving door of commentators on WORLD WIDE and WCW PRO has spun so wildly, one could get dizzy. Eric Bischoff may have an upper midwestern following but replacing Lance Russell was a slap in the face to many fans. Further, it's long since time a gag was placed over Diamond Dallas Page's mouth. It may not bother you but you haven't seen my station's mail complaining about his incessant "good god" babbling.

The WORLD WIDE show has been through more color commentators than Elizabeth Taylor has husbands. No one any more than I will attest to what Magnum T.A. meant to wrestling in the mid-1980s and had he not been severely injured, might have supplanted Flair as the biggest name in the game. But, again, he is not an announcer. Ironically, Magnum was the first guy Jim Herd fired after taking over in 1989 because his work was so weak alongside Ross on WCW. I can't see where there's been dramatic improvement.

The problem here: this is one of the few areas which seemed to function better when the announcers were left out of the booker's hands. That trend changed when Ole Anderson pulled all the active working heels except the Freebirds off as color commentators and has been nothing but a merry-go-round since.

OTHER TV PROPOSALS

***HIRE A LEGIT PRODUCER AND LET HIM DO HIS JOB: Where Vince McMahon has been smart is in bringing in a former NBC sports producer with Emmy-winning credentials and allowing him to structure the broadcasts (though you always know Vince has the final say).

For three years, we've called on WCW to hire a qualified, creative producer who can be free to revamp the TV formats and carry out innovative ways to showcase the booker's storylines.

***INVOLVE THE FANS MORE: Every six weeks or so, give them a choice of three possible matches and three 900-number lines to call in their votes. And, for once, reveal and use the legit results and have the match on TV. Have trivia contests like Ross does on his radio show and send an announcer with one of the wrestlers into the crowd for some Q-and-A, much as is done on mainline talk shows. Anything to make the shows more interactive with the audience.

OTHER PROPOSALS

Here's perhaps the most dramatic and unconventional proposal: after the BASH tour, get completely out of the arena business for 10 to 13 weeks, except for TV tapings, CLASH specials and pay-per-views. Long forgotten is how during the first two quarters of 1989, Flair-Steamboat drew 500 fans in Dayton, 800 in Columbus OH, 700 in Raleigh and assorted other weak houses. And that was when anticipation was on the upswing for a turnaround in this company. The low crowds were a shakedown from the tail end of the Crockett/Rhodes era. As a WCW insider astutely said at the first WRESTLE WAR in Nashville: "We don't have a town we go to that we can draw well in. They're too burned out from the junk Dusty gave them."

Rhodes has contended to TBS and Turner Home Entertainment executives it's just going to take time for his program to catch on. It is? A great or even a very good pay-per-view could have done wonders to dilute the hue and cry over Flair. Instead, viewers received the worst pay-per-view in the history of Turner Home Entertainment and even the high-ranking exec who consulted me resoundingly agrees.

I would completely suspend arena cards until a team is put together who can do this thing right because I don't believe viewers and ticketbuyers are going to stand for many more stutter-steps. No less than one Jim Cornette, whose instincts have been sorely underrated, has suggested such. If it takes three months to refocus this thing and give it one final gallant shot, take the time---then only run in the venues on

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Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings. Tape TV on Mondays and Tuesdays and use Wednesday and Thursday to let your guys have some much-needed rest time or to do public service work for you. For goodness sake, that's not original and should have been implemented long ago. Personally, I'd even take it a step further. If I were making a gutsy call, I'd do what Jack Petrik once suggested as early as December 1988: turn this into an event-of-the-month business like boxing----do perhaps six live pay-per-view shows at an affordable \$9.95 which probably have more gimmick themes and two shows per year at \$19.95 (likely STARRCADE and THE GREAT AMERICAN BASH). In the other four months, have your CLASH specials on TBS and only go to the arenas, at most, twice a weekend and on the weekend of your pay-per-views, that's the only show you do. Think of the travel cost savings and the need you create in fans. Of course, that is if you have enough of the wrestlers and matches they want to see.

LUGER AS CHAMPION

Throw out the Flair faux pas. Luger has a strike against him he can do nothing about. The "we want Flair" chants will go on for a while but eventually die out.

What troubles me far more about this is I feel in the current day, this promotion sorely needs a babyface champion and Rhodes clumsily evolved from heel champ straight to heel champ. I do not disagree a lick with those who say Luger is more effective as a villain. If you believe what folks who know him say, the heel Luger is far closer to Barry Pfohl.

But if you're going to have a heel champion, mold him in the fashion of a Gene Kiniski. You younger fans won't remember him---but talk about a high workrate, go-out-and-do-it heel, it was Kiniski. He cheated like a heel, he roughhoused it but he never needed a manager or outside help.

What I fear is we've gone from Flair, the champion who never wins, to Luger, the champion who needs a bodyguard and a manager to win. With a build like that (never mind the wise-cracks), shouldn't that alone make you invincible?

If you're going to get him over, have him beat people consistently with that piledriver. If that's the trademark which won him the belt, let that be it. But don't saddle him with Harley Race and Curtis Hughes. Let him be his own man and be a singular monster. Under Rhodes, Harley will be another James J. Dillon and the analogy for Hughes is a cliché.

What further can't be done is to short-term Luger as a three-month champion. I've already heard proposals for Ron Simmons to win the belt as an attraction to bring back African American fans. A cut in ticket prices would be a far greater attraction. Simmons would make a tremendous champion but it's too soon after a change. What could build Simmons is a non-title victory over Luger at the CLASH. Even if he loses decisively at HALLOWEEN HAVOC, you'll always have the tape to prove Ron could have done it.

The biggest-money singles match now available to this promotion is Luger vs. Sting but you can't do that one for at least a year without hot-shotting it too quickly and burning it out. That match needs as much time to build as Hogan vs. Savage. Sting should be re-established as the U.S. champion but concentrate on beating opponent after opponent for that belt with Luger dodging him until perhaps next May. I hope the front office doesn't panic and try to rush this one up for STARRCADE.

THE STEINERS

I won't even preface this statement with the word "arguably." The Steiner Brothers have been the biggest stars in this promotion in the last year and with a healthy Scott, these two have more international appeal and can attract more ticketbuyers and money than Luger or Sting at this point.

One of the most horrendous mistakes, from my view, is the teaming of Rick with Bill Kaszmeier for this world tag team tournament. Kaszmeier is a tremendous weightlifter but I don't know how many of you remember his work from the latter days of the old Continental promotion. He was used in a few angles and scattered matches and, well, enough said.

With Scott on the mend probably until early winter, the time has come to rebuild Rick Steiner into an equally strong singles star and since he and Scott have teamed for a year and a half, it would be again fresh. And if you want a strong power match with a guy who comes across as goofy enough not to be afraid of Luger, a Steiner-Luger series well-booked could be an attractive combination.

But when Scott returns, it almost behooves WCW, in some instances, to make the Steiners' matches the finales on live cards because they are a bigger draw than Luger, have participated in arguably the three top TV matches of 1991 and have strong crossover appeal between kids, teens and adults without even having to "characterize" them. The toughest thing for the promotion is to find fresh opponents for them or keep the Japanese combos coming on a regular basis. In large measure, the Steiners---not Luger---are the standardbearers for what remains of this promotion.

SUMMARY

I have always told you, as MATWATCHers, that many of the things I believe are right turn out to be incorrect. I have, likewise, made the same remark to people within the profession who---for whatever ghastly reason---choose to ask my opinion.

I try to look on things as a fan because I still am one, as hard as pro wrestling is making that for me. Many things we, as journalists, objectively see as mistakes are expressed looking through cloudless glass. Internal politics, personality conflicts and outright stubbornness often interrupt what seems to us to be a perfectly logical progression.

It is entirely possible that much of what I have spent the last four pages proposing is far too little, much too late. We may, indeed, be in the latter days of pro wrestling in the era as we now know it---though, if we are, it will be a slow Armageddon. I still am reminded of some of the most astute words about this industry I've heard expressed in recent years: "This business has hot-shot itself to death." The speaker was one Charlie Platt, a veteran of several Southern promotions who has seen all of today's stars in their infancy. I painfully believe if WCW does not find that "right track," whatever it is, it may live to see the reality of the black wreath delivered to its CNN Center offices this week.

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Monday Night in Memphis

LAWLER DROPS USWA BELT TO KONG

MEMPHIS----In another Memphis mystery, Awesome Kong defeated Jerry Lawler for the USWA "world" heavyweight championship Monday night at the Pipkin Building.

A crowd of 920 turned out to see Lawler drop the belt for the fifth time since winning the old AWA world title from Curt Hennig in 1988.

Lawler had defeated Kong the previous week. The rematch stipulation had Lawler winning all the gold owned by Kong's manager Reggie B. Fine if he defeated Awesome.

During a referee distraction, Fine used one of the gold chokers he wears to conk Lawler and Kong pinned the Memphis king for the title. A rematch was expected to take place Aug. 5 with more special stipulations.

ALSO MONDAY IN MEMPHIS: Jeff Jarrett and Robert Fuller defeated the Barroom Brawlers in a barroom cage match to split the Barroom team and a six-person mixed match with Tony and Kim Anthony and Cousin Harold against Eric Embry/Tom Prichard/Miss Texas ended in a no-contest brawl.

AND THE OTHERS: Referee Paul (Heyman Sr.) Neighbors defeated Tojo Yamamoto, Bill Dundee won over Randy Harris and Danny Davis upended Leatherface (Brian Lee).

WILL HE OR WON'T HE?: Two stories coming from the Titan camp...one, Hulk Hogan has intimated to Vince McMahon that he's ready to hang it up after his two-month hiatus in the fall and would be willing to drop the belt and move on. The other one: McMahon has asked Hogan to drop the belt to a short-term intermediary (a la Sgt. Slaughter) who would then lose it to Sid Justice. Word has it Hogan has refused that.

BUSICH & BRUNO: Nick (Big Bully) Busich debuted at Monday night's WWF TV tapings. Downtown Bruno Lauer came in as his manager. First time out, Bruno was called Henry Herman in an obvious Pee Wee Herman lampoon. But for once, taste ruled in the wake of Paul Reubens' arrest on exposure charges last week. Second time out, Bruno was called Herbie Wilmington.

WARRIOR ON THE ROCKS?: Something is brewing with The Ultimate Warrior. He has missed a number of recent dates with Randy Savage subbing and did not appear at Monday's or Tuesday's tapings. He's still expected for SUMMER SLAM but some unspecified heat is developing.

OTHER TITAN NOTES: Akio Sato was back Monday and in dark matches, Hogan pinned Undertaker clean in the middle and Justice defeated Typhoon in a near-squash.

TURN AWAY IF YOU DON'T WANT TO KNOW: Seriously. But the tapings leaked two finishes at SUMMER SLAM: Bret Hart takes the Intercontinental belt from Curt Hennig and Ted DiBiase did interviews confirming he loses the Million \$ Belt to Virgil.

FLAIRWATCH: As of publication date (Thursday), Ric Flair reportedly had not made up his mind on his future. But he was a clear free agent as of Friday. Sources within Titan are

Is Something Brewing?

EX-RING STARS

VISIT CNN CENTER

ATLANTA---MATWATCH has learned through four sources close to World Championship Wrestling at least four well-known former wrestling personalities have been seen in the CNN Center offices in the last week.

The sources indicate former Universal Wrestling Federation owner Bill Watts, ex-WCW booker Ole Anderson and former AWA executives Verne and Greg Gagne have had conversations with TBS executives.

No one within WCW would acknowledge on-the-record the presence or contact of any of the four or with whom they met. But a key insider indicates talks have centered around the talent coordinator post held by Virgil Runnels and the executive vice president role of Jim Herd. Several insiders have also mentioned the name of former Wrestling Network syndication chief and current Georgia events coordinator Rob Garner as a possible candidate for a WCW executive post.

Two weeks ago, WCW president Jack Petrik openly expressed dissatisfaction with ratings levels for TBS wrestling shows (last weekend's three shows averaged a 1.9) and the record-low buy-rate for THE GREAT AMERICAN BASH (a 1.0 after three repeat showings raised it from an 0.9), along with profusely declining arena crowds. But no public indication has been offered on any time frames Petrik is expecting changes.

TBS is currently beginning a major research project, including audience focus groups, one-on-one interviews and in-person and telephone questionnaires to plot a future course for WCW and its personalities.

are virtually assuring Flair is coming, as is the typical Norm DaCosta column in a Toronto paper (of course, DaCosta---the one mainline columnist who is more inaccurate than Jim Herd has ever accused newsletters of being---has been insisting Flair was on his way to Titan for five years). At the WWF tapings, which go through the weekend of Aug. 31-Sept. 1, no mention was made of anything to indicate a Flair arrival. If Ric signed over the weekend, you'll read it here last because I'm at my 20-year high school reunion and we published early.

BLACK WREATH: A \$200 black wreath was delivered to the WCW offices Wednesday with a card attached, reading: "Our deepest sympathies on the death of your promotion. Signed, Jim Cornette and Stan Lane." Some of the office people were a bit nervous, thinking the promotion may have been sold but Jim Herd reportedly laughed it off.

HOW INSIDE IS IT?: The syndie series INSIDE EDITION is preparing a piece on the steroid situation for either this week or next. Producers did a lengthy phone interview with Dr. George T. Zahorian II, in which he reportedly called Hulk Hogan "a liar," and told IE Hogan had a serious steroid problem until 1989 but didn't know about the last two years. But when cameras rolled, Zahorian would not acknowledge any of it.

GLOBAL GOINGS: Terry Gordy is definitely committed for the coming weekend's Global North American tourney and as of midweek, was working on getting Steve Williams to appear.
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Ratings Go South

**PTW NIPS WCW
IN WEAK WEEK**

In what ties the lowest-rated week for wrestling in modern cable television history, PRIME TIME WRESTLING topped the Nielsen audience numbers for the seventh consecutive week, narrowly edging WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING.

But with the exception of the WCW POWER HOUR, every series took a significant drop and ALL-AMERICAN WRESTLING posted its 1991 low.

The five WWP/WCW series averaged a 2.0, which tied the all-time lowest average set in early May.

PRIME TIME, highlighted by the Sgt. Slaughter kidnapping of Lord Alfred Hayes and The Mountie's parking lot attack on Big Bossman, dropped to a 2.4 rating and 4 per cent share of audience, its lowest mark since May 13. PTW dropped 17% from its previous week.

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING, headlined by a Freebirds-Hardliners world tag tourney match and a Johnny B. Badd-Terrence Taylor U.S. title elimination bout, was a close second at 2.3/6.1 but fell from the 2.6 of the week preceding.

WCW MAIN EVENT, which featured a Ron Simmons-Diamond Studd contest with a cheap ending, dropped to its lowest figure in more than three months, posting a 2.0/5.0, a 26% slide from July 21.

ALL-AMERICAN, which has been in a five-week decline, skidded all the way to a 1.8/5.8, its first failure to break a 2 this year, down 19% from last week.

POWER HOUR stayed firm. Its 1.6 rating was the same as July 20 with only a slight drop in share from 8.1 to 7.8.

CABLE

Week Ending July 29	Rating	Share	Total Homes
WWF PRIME TIME (USA 7/29)	2.4	4.0	1.36 million
WCW WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP (TBS 7/27)	2.3	6.1	1.32 million
WCW MAIN EVENT (TBS 7/28)	2.0	5.0	1.14 million
WWF ALL-AMERICAN (USA 7/28)	1.8	5.8	1.02 million
WCW POWER HOUR (TBS 7/27)	1.6	7.8	904,000

MATWATCHING
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IPW PREMIERES: The new International Pro circuit debuted with two hours of TV tapings at the Disney-MGM studios in Orlando

Monday night. Bob Armstrong and Mike Jackson were the hosts.

MORE IPW: Primary names working the IPW show: Paul Orndorff, Scott Armstrong, Boris Zhukov and Wendell Cooley. We're told one of the top matches featured Ebony & Ivory winning over Brad and Bart Batten.

HE'LL TRY IT: According to Japanese sources, if Jack Petrik doesn't get Dusty out before January, he's planning a father-and-son tag match with Dustin on the Egg Dome show. Talk in the office is Dusty wants to book the angle to get him involved at the CLASH, if not at the Omni on the 25th.

WHEN WILL THEY START?: On his WRESTLING HOTLINE segment

Wednesday night, Dennis A. Brent announced WCW is about to begin steroid testing. No specifics were announced. Brent told callers if they see WCW's wrestlers getting smaller, they shouldn't boo them.

Guest Column

**HOW ABOUT A
DIFFERENT CHAMP?**

By **CARLIE GILL**
Anchorage, Alaska

With house show business horrible and TV ratings down, I'll propose a radical idea for WCW: experiment with Bobby Eaton as WCW champion.

Why? First of all, he is the best technical wrestler in the world, even surpassing Ric Flair. Talented, unselfish and seemingly free of ego, he deserves the belt on general principle. Second, WCW might benefit from a champion who is always the underdog. I've heard other suggest Brian Pillman for this role. However, he has lost too much credibility in the past year. It wouldn't work. On a house show card, if Bobby were booked against Nikita Koloff, I believe the reaction would be: "Geez, how can Eaton get past him?" The curiosity factor would possibly increase houses and TV ratings. Bobby would sell a beating almost every night and get sympathy from crowds. The tough Northeast audience wouldn't be a problem, either. Bobby is over with them already. With Pillman, he might not draw the sympathy and that would kill the gimmick.

I'm not saying Bobby would sell out arenas. He wouldn't. But neither did Sting and neither will Luger. It's just the state of the business and that's a column for another time. But perhaps, with a solid undercard, it would be unexpected enough to increase houses to an acceptable level. Most fans are smart enough to know Bobby always gives them their money's worth. Plus, matches against Koloff, Windham or the Japanese would be fresh. Flair vs. Luger and Flair vs. Sting have been done to death. Only Flair's excellence made them watchable.

WCW is digging its own grave trying to find their own Hulk Hogan. Just because Vince McMahon wants an anabolic monster in his number one spot doesn't mean WCW needs to follow suit. With Eaton as world champ and the Steiners as tag champs, WCW can truly say "We Wrestle." Of course, I can hear Jim Herd now: "This is crazy, Bobby isn't marketable!" Okay, Jim, he won't sell lots of dolls and junk but he will bring consistency and reliability to the world title. He won't jump to Titan, thus making the company look foolish and he presents a positive image for WCW, should Connie Chung come calling again.

Sting was WCW champ and failed miserably because he honestly looks as if he doesn't give a hoot any more. Luger seems to try harder but, frankly, he'll be lucky to be alive in ten years. And despite their popularity, they haven't set the gates on fire, either. That's because kids buy Galoob dolls, not tickets. Bobby would bring with him an older and more sophisticated fan base, much like Flair.

I see WCW dying because it is run by a bunch of blind mice who make bad decisions. You don't need a new Hulk Hogan, you need another Ric Flair. Spend nine months to a year with Bobby in a steady push and then give him the belt. For once, let the wrestling rule!

(The guest columnist is a regular contributor to WRESTLING'S MAIN EVENT magazine, published by veteran ring journalist Sandy Krebs.)

MATWATCH

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VIDEOTS

July 29-Aug. 4

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Because of the early publication deadline, some of the week's shows are being abbreviated or omitted.)

(WWF/USA) - [PRIME TIME]: Greg Valentine d. Warlord; (ANGLE) Big Bossman doesn't appear when introed. Mountie/Jimmy Hart come out & gloat. Later, clips shown of Mountie attacking Bossman w. cattle prod on parking lot. Bossman later found handcuffed to pipe, foaming at mouth; Jimmy Snuka d. Butch Thomas; Natural Disasters d. Stan Saxon/Doug Casen; (FUNERAL PARLOR) Paul Bearer w. Jake Roberts; (SUMMER SLAM REPORT); (ANGLE) Slaughter's Marauders angered at "press conference" questions. Sarge & gang kidnap Alfred Hayes and later leave him stranded at unknown location; Ted DiBiase d. Jason Anderson; Undertaker d. Brian Jewell; Rockers d. Ed Moretti/Mike Roselli; Jim Duggan double DQ vs. I.R. Schyster. I.R.S. tries to ambush Jim w. 2x4 after but Jim ducks and smashes I.R.; (VIDEO) Skinner; (WWF TAG TITLE) Nasty Boys d. Hart Foundation by DQ to keep belts when Bret Hart caught w. megaphone; (FINALE) Bossman appears and vows revenge. RESTHOLD-PLUS.

(WCW/TBS) - [WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP]: {Key Match/WORLD TAG TOURNEY ELIMINATION} Arn Anderson/Larry Zbyszko d. Young Pistols. (REPLAY) Hardliners-Freebirds. NO RATING.
[MAIN EVENT]: Bobby Eaton vs. Ricky Morton; (DANGER ZONE) Paul E. on Lex Luger's new alliance. NO RATING.

(AWA: LOOKING BACK) - [1984/6-MAN]: Road Warriors/Paul Ellering d. Larry & Curt Hennig/The Crusher; (VIDEO) Best of the 1980s; (1984) Rick Martel d. Nick Bockwinkel. DRAW-PLUS.

(IWCCW) - Zap d. Sampson by DQ; (VIDEO) Boston Bad Boy; (REPLAY) Tony Atlas d. Ivan Putski and Scott Putski saves from beating; (PWI PRESS CONF.) Bill Apter w. Dory Funk Jr.; (SPECIAL REPORT) Funk named IWCCW commissioner. BOMB-PLUS.

(WWF/SYN) - [CHALLENGE]: DiBiase d. Anderson; Berserker d. Bob Johnson; Bushwhackers d. John Peterson/Mike Starr; Mountie d. Thatcher; Davey Boy Smith d. Bob Bradley; Col. Mustafa d. Black Knight; (SPECIAL REPORT) "Match Made in Hell" update; (SUMMER SLAM REPORT). RESTHOLD.

(PRO WRESTLING '91) - Festus d. Ron Davis; (GLOBAL) Patriot d. John Tatum; (CLASSIC/WORLD CLASS) Kevin Von Erich d. Brian Adias; Brute Force d. Jimmy Rogers/Mike Roberts; (INTL/WWC) Huracan Castillo Jr. d. Ringo Mendoza; Steve Lawler d. Fabian. RESTHOLD.

(UIW) - Dixie Devastation d. Lords of Darkness on reversal when ref Howard Goldman finds chain Bubba used & planted on Lords. Lords threaten to slam Howard; Beachboy Vinnie Young d. Adrian Hall; Cream Team d. Intimidator/Tommy Rose when Intimidator clotheslines own partner; Corey Roberts d. Rasta the Voodooon but Rasta attacks Corey & Dave McAllister after; Tom Brandi d. King Kalua on ref's decision but Kalua/Kevin (The Truth) Casey attack Tom after; Kirk Dredd/A.J. Fritzoid d. Axl Rotten/Steve Valentino; (FINALE) Casey/Bounty Hunter deck McAllister so Casey becomes color commentator. DRAW-PLUS.

(GLOBAL SUPERCARD/ESPN) - [Mon./LT. HWT. TOURNEY]: {Quarterfinals} Lightning Kid d. Chaz; Handsome Stranger d. Rip Rogers; Mike Davis d. Brian Adias; (NEWSROOM) Joe Pedicino on The Cartel; (REPLAY) First-round matches. RESTHOLD-PLUS.

[Tue./LT. HWT. TOURNEY]: {Quarterfinals} John Tatum d. Terry Garvin using chain; Jerry Lynn d. Terry Daniels; Steve Simpson d. Adrian Street when Adrian injured; (NEWSROOM) Joe on GWF tag tourney; (FAN SPOT) Fans ask Boni Blackstone if Tatum is looking for valet. RESTHOLD-PLUS.

[Wed./LT. HWT. TOURNEY]: {Semifinals} Lightning Kid d. Stranger after Rasta works voodoo magic; Simpson d. Davis; Lynn d. Tatum by DQ when Tatum savate kicks ref Sean O'Brien; (NEWSROOM) Joe on lt. hwt. tourney, Paul E. & Missy. DRAW.

[Thu./LT. HWT. TOURNEY]: {Lt. Hwt. Round-Robin Finals} Lynn d. Simpson; Lightning Kid d. Lynn to win belt; (SEGMENT) Rip Rogers/Makham Singh continue to refuse to tell Joe names of other Cartel members & The Boss. DRAW-PLUS.

(GLOBAL/SYN) - [MAJOR LEAGUE]: Davis d. Adias; Rasta the Voodooon d. Chaz; Randy Rhodes d. Jeff Gaylord with assist from Chris Love; Rogers/Singh d. Bubba Fangman/Terry Daniels; Bill Irwin d. Skip Young; Garvin d. Tatum; (HIGHLIGHTS) Lt. hwt. tourney; (NEWSROOM) Joe on tag tourney. RESTHOLD-PLUS.

LINES OF THE WEEK

1. Scott Hudson, GLOBAL, on Rasta: "You need a zoning variance to get around this guy." 2. Hudson, GLOBAL, on Lightning Kid: "He's had more stalls than the Globaldome restroom." 3. Jim Ross, JIM ROSS SHOW: "When you go to work for a promotion, you have two choices: you can choose to wrestle under the character name they want you to or you can choose unemployment." 4. Bobby Heenan, PTW, on WWF pictures: "These come in handy when you run out of Charmin." 5. Dave McAllister/Craig Johnson, UIW: (DMC) "Dixie Devastation, these guys are real students of the Civil War." (CJ) "Too bad they don't know who won." 6. Ross, JRS: "I hope we can get this thing back to wrestling because that's what you people keep telling me you want." 7. Heenan, PTW: "If they're holding Alfred for ransom, he's not worth a dime." 8. Johnson/Hudson, GLOBAL: (CJ) "Rip Rogers claims to be the most fit man in wrestling." (SH) "Yes, he does throw the most fits." 9. Joe Pedicino/Chris Love, GLOBAL: (JP) "227 pounds? It's a miracle if Randy Rhodes weighs 287." (CL) "It would be a miracle if you weighed under 487." (JP) "I'm not trying to get into the light heavyweight tournament." 10. Sean Mooney, PTW, on Paul Bearer: "I think there are parts unknown in that urn." 11. Heenan, PTW: "A friend in need is a pest." 12. Steven DeTruth, PW'91, on Gordon Clements: "Just what I've always wanted: a kinder, gentler commissioner."

QUESTIONS OF THE WEEK - 1. Makham Singh, GLOBAL: "Is your name Joe Parrott or Joe Pedicino? You keep asking the same questions over and over." 2. John Tatum/Boni Blackstone, GLOBAL: (BB) "Are you auditioning for valets?" (JT) "Why, do you want to try out, Boni? I'd love to have you."

STRONGEST COMMENTS - 1. Hudson, WVEU: "Harley Race is old enough to be Luger's grandfather." 2. DeTruth, WVEU: "With the main event at SUMMER SLAM, you'd think Dusty Rhodes was booking the WWF, too."

NICKNAMES OF THE WEEK - 1. COWARD OF THE COUNTY (Mountie on Bossman). 2. THE BIONIC PALATE (Johnson on John Tatum). 3. GORDON SLOWLY (DeTruth on Solie).

DREADED GLITCH AWARD - GLOBAL, for HOLLYWODD John Tatum.

BOO AWARD - PRIME TIME, for parking lot attack on Bossman & kidnaping of Alfred Hayes. Wholesome family entertainment?

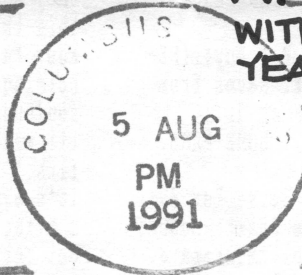


THE **HULK**
BEFORE



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AFTER (STERIODS)
WITH ONLY A FEW MORE
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